

# Testimony By Dean Challenged

Washington

The transcripts of recordings of President Nixon's Watergate conversations released yesterday depict an embattled leader searching early last year for a way to keep details of the case from becoming public — and being indecisive on the best way to do it.

A White House statement, which accompanied the transcripts, contended that the tapes prove that Mr. Nixon had no knowledge of the bugging or the coverup and that John W. Dean III is the real culprit.

The transcripts, edited by the White House before release, indicate that Mr. Nixon ruled out clemency for E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the Watergate conspirators. And they indicate a great deal of interest on the part of the President about the possibility of paying hush money to Hunt for his silence.

At a March 21, 1973, meeting, the transcript indicates the President seemed to press at length for such payments. Some was paid that night, according to a subsequent Watergate coverup indictment. But at a meeting on April 14, when silence money for Hunt was discussed again, the transcripts indicate the President said funds could be found but he added "but not to hush up . . . that's the point."

At his controversial meeting on March 21, 1973, with Dean, Mr. Nixon, according to the transcript, discussed over and over again paying off Hunt as a viable option, and never said that silence money would be wrong. In fact, he said at one point that paying as much as \$1 million "would be worthwhile."

As for the role of Dean, the President's former counsel and now his chief accuser, the transcripts may

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suggest that he was considerably less zealous about getting the truth out than he led the Senate Watergate committee to believe he had been.

The White House did not release the more than 1200 pages of transcripts until mid-afternoon making a careful reading yesterday of all the conversations impossible. A closer reading in the next days and weeks should provide a clearer picture of the President's actions.

But there were indications in the transcripts of certain points:

- There was no evidence in the transcripts that Mr. Nixon knew anything ahead of time about the planning and execution of the Watergate burglary on June 17, 1972.

- Nothing in the transcripts showed that Mr. Nixon had a clear picture of the facts as early as Sept. 15, 1972 — thus contradicting Dean's testimony — but the President appeared to have some knowledge of the situation before the March 21 meeting.

- There was no indication of any question in the minds of Mr. Nixon or his chief assistants, H. R. Haldeman and

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John D. Ehrlichman, that as many facts as possible should be kept from the public and the prosecutors.

- Mr. Nixon's motive seemed to be to keep the facts under cover as much to protect himself politically as to keep loyal assistants from being prosecuted.

- The transcripts strongly support one of the Watergate special prosecutor's theories — that a motive behind the alleged high-level cover-up was a desire to prevent disclosure of the 1971 burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist. Nonetheless, the transcripts indicate the President seemed agreeable to paying Hunt mostly to buy his silence on the Water-

gate case rather than on the Ellsberg case.

- Mr. Nixon did rule out executive clemency for Hunt, but his primary reason appeared to be that the granting of clemency should be unwise politically rather than wrong morally or legally.

- Even before the 1972 election, Mr. Nixon promised Dean that after he was elected he would take strides to use the FBI and other federal agencies against his political enemies.

The White House said that 11 of the 42 conversations subpoenaed by the House Judiciary Committee were never recorded or did not take place and that, therefore, there were no transcripts.

According to J. Fred Buzhardt, the White House counsel, four conversations on April 15, 1973, were not recorded because the machine ran out of tape before

the discussions took place. Five other conversations, he said, took place on telephones that were not connected to a recording device, and tapes of two others were never found, apparently meaning that the conversations never occurred, Buzhardt suggested.

In many of the transcripts, the actual words from the tape were replaced by the notations "unintelligible" or "expletive."

It was difficult to know what information was lost, but many of the allegedly "unintelligible" sections seemed to be unusually significant or in areas where the President's voice would logically have been raised.

"We had better get the other things out of the way," the President said on April 14, 1973. Then the transcript continued:

"I think we're going to be — I don't want to be hammered — (unintelligible) I don't want to — I don't (unintelligible) they'll hammer the hell out of us anyway, but I don't (unintelligible) that's a — that's just a (unintelligible) all here. We'll take—we'll take a hell of a beating (unintelligible) in the next 30 days, a lot of heat, we'll take with regard to why we aren't appearing

why we aren't going to appear before the committee

By March 21, 1973, the seven men initially convicted for breaking into the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate building had been paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in money that had been raised for Mr. Nixon's election campaign.

Early on in the March 21 meeting, the transcript says that Dean mentioned to Mr. Nixon Hunt's "blackmail" demand for another \$120,000. If Hunt were not paid the money, Dean said, he would tell of the "seamy" things he had done for the White House.

Mr. Nixon accepted this disclosure with apparent equanimity and elicited from Dean the guess that it might cost as much as \$1

million to buy off Hunt forever.

The President remarked, "We could get that. On the money, if you need the money you could get that. You could get a million dollars. You could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten. It is not easy, but it could be done. But the question is, who in the hell would handle it? Any ideas on that?"

A few minutes later, the President and Dean had the following exchanges:

Nixon: "Just look at the immediate problem, don't you think you have to handle Hunt's financial situation damn soon?"

Dean "I think that is — I talked with Mitchell about that last night and —

Nixon" "It seems to me we have to keep the cap on the bottle that much, or we don't have any options."

Dean: "That's right."

Nixon: "Either that or it all blows right now?"

Dean: "That's the question."

Earlier this year, Mr. Nixon said he had asserted that "it would be wrong" to pay silence money. In a later speech, the President corrected himself and said that he was talking directly about the granting of clem-



ency when he said "It would be wrong" and indirectly about paying blackmail money.

Following is the critical conversation:

Nixon: "Let me put it this way: Let us suppose that you get the million bucks, and you get the proper way to handle it. You could hold that side?"

Dean: "Uh, huh."

Nixon: "It would seem to me that would be worthwhile."

Dean: "Well, that's one problem."

Nixon: "I know you have a problem here. You have the problem with Hunt and his clemency."

Dean: "That's right. And you are going to have a clemency problem with the others. They all are going to expect to be out, and that may put you in a position that is just untenable at some point. You know, the Watergate hearings just over, Hunt now demanding clemency or he is going to blow. And, politically, it's impossible for you to do it. You know, after everybody . . ."

Nixon: "Thats right!"  
(The transcriber's exclamation point.)

Dean: "I am not sure that you will ever be able to deliver on the clemency. It may be just too hot."

Nixon: "You can't do it politically until after the '74 elections, that's for sure. Your point is that even then you couldn't do it."

Dean: "That's right. It may further involve you in a way you should not be involved in this."

Nixon: "No — it is wrong, that's for sure."

In his television defense of his position Monday night, Mr. Nixon quoted himself as having said that clemency was "wrong," but he did not give the entire context of the discussion.

About halfway through the Nixon-Dean meeting, Haldeman entered the room. In his broadcast Monday night, Mr. Nixon quoted a discussion between himself and Haldeman out of context.

Mr. Nixon noted that he

had told Haldeman that, if the money were paid, "we are going to be bled to death. And, in the end, it is all going to come out anyway. Then you get the worst of both worlds. We are going to lose, and people are going to . . ."

Then Haldeman interrupted and said, "And look like dopes."

The President quoted himself Monday night as replaying, "And in effect look like a coverup. So that we can't do."

The transcripts show that Mr. Nixon never directly ordered that the money be paid, but the indictment of Haldeman and six other top officials alleges that within hours of the March 21 meeting arrangements were made to pay Hunt \$75,000.

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